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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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TRIALS OF FAITH.

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."—1 PETER i., 7.

Peter called himself an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul also regarded himself in the same light. This epistle is directed to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. By *strangers*, doubtless, was meant exiled Jews—his own countrymen who had been scattered to all parts of the world, and were found with their synagogues in every principal city, and to whom, always, first, the Gospel of Christ was preached, and to whom, generally, as to a kind of nucleus, Gentile converts were joined; so that often the Gentile church, as it might be called—the church at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Galatia, anywhere—was at the center Jewish, and around it was a fringe of Gentile converts.

It is this fact that gives character to the different epistles which were written by Paul and the other apostles. Where the element in the different churches was almost wholly Jewish, the letter addressed itself to the actual opinions and difficulties and wants of that church, and discussed them after the manner of Jewish thoughts, from the Jewish scriptures, by Jewish illustration; but where—as at Corinth, for instance—a large part of the church were Greeks, the letters written to them (as the first and second of Corinthians) had a constant regard to Greek ideas, Greek morals, Greek difficulties. They did not exclude the Jewish, but they mainly bore upon the Greek. So that all of the letters of the different apostles that have been preserved, and that are authoritative, as we should expect letters from sensible men to do, not

SUNDAY MORNING, Feb. 7, 1875. LESSON: 1 Peter i. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 509, 537.

only reveal somewhat of the personal characteristics of the writers, but bear upon the history and condition of the churches to which they were addressed.

Now, what was meant by the Apostle Peter, in writing to these scattered, exiled Jews in Asia Minor, and through all the regions round about Illyricum, by *the trial of their faith?* The preceding two verses speak of this:

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [That is, if the last day is near at hand.] Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."

Then follows our text:

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

What are we to understand, then, by the *trials* that they were going through? What are we to understand by the *faith* that was tried? What are we to understand by the condition of faith at the coming of Christ that should appear unto praise and glory?

First, as to faith. We are to bear in mind that, in the earlier periods of Christian preaching, the main teaching was in respect to a personal Christ. That element can never again be in this world as it was in the very earliest stages of preaching. Peter goes before an audience, and says, "I am the man who was called of Jesus Christ. This is his history. I heard him say these words. I saw him perform these miracles. I was with him in Jerusalem when he was arrested. I followed afar off, unworthily, when he was tried. I saw him crucified. I witnessed the darkness. I was among those who went earliest to the tomb, hearing that he was risen. I saw him after his resurrection. I talked with him, and he with me; and these are his teachings." We shall never have anybody come to us so. We shall never have a witness that will preach Christ to us. You can tell what Christ has done in you, and for you, morally and spiritually; but you will never have any one who will say, with the apostles: I am a witness, personally, to all that I tell you in respect to Jesus Christ.

The truths of Christ; the love of the living Saviour pres-

ent with them,—these were witnessed to by one who had seen him and heard him.

Such was the early faith of Jesus. *We* have to take him with a historic intervention. Then we have to translate him again into a kind of spiritual influence. They, on the other hand, thought of him as a Person, not only living, but before long to come again—to reappear. Doubtless Christians for the first hundred years lived in the expectation of seeing Christ themselves, in the body, before they should die. That was undoubtedly the faith of more than the first hundred years. The power of that expectation is inconceivable, unless it be by those who believe in the second coming of Christ. There is an immense power in that, if we only could believe it.

So there was a personal enthusiasm of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who had gone up to heaven to prepare a place for his followers, and who was soon coming back to earth; and they were waiting for his coming. Meanwhile they were making preparations by which they should become acceptable disciples and followers of him when he should come, in their last, or nearly last, days. Then all the dispositions, all the living experiences, which were the fruits and evidences of their belief in Christ, were a part of their faith. In short, their belief in Christ, and their fidelity to their belief, must be joined together in the conception of faith as it existed in the earlier disciples. There was very little intellectual teaching in that day. Systems of truth, as they now present themselves to you and to me, were not born. They are the product of a later stage of religious intellectual development. Not for three or four hundred years was there any system of doctrinal Christianity, such as we now have in books and catechisms, and from the pulpit. The primitive faith was an ardent and enthusiastic belief in a living Person called Jesus Christ, who was not far away, who was coming every day nearer, and who promised them that if they would wear his dispositions and fulfill his will, they should reign with him forever and forever. There was this enthusiasm of personal adherence to Jesus. He was their hero, of a transcendent kind. They had the highest form of hero-worship.

It was not doctrine worship; it was not church worship; it was not religion worship: it was personal worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The personal element in Christ was intense, and glowing, and permanent. They were living close to the days in which he had suffered. We are two thousand years away from those days. To us, it is a long-time-gone event.

Empires have come up and gone down. Governments have grown from nothing to imperial proportions, and again have come to nothing, and are but forms. Laws that dominated the world are all sleeping in libraries, and in their places systems of laws and governments have sprung up which were utterly unknown before. Men stood where they could almost hear the footsteps of Christ. The events of his life were yet ringing as news in the world. There was, therefore, an intensity of faith in him as a *Person*, so near were men to the time when he was on earth. The men who taught them could tell them how he looked, the color of his eye, the form of his mouth. They could describe to them the brow, the hair, the gesture, the stature. They could inform them when he rose and when he slept. They could show them what was his gait, and what were his modes of conversation. Everything that makes personality sharp and clear could be told them. There is a great deal of difference between reading things in books and hearing them from those who have seen them.

I stood by the side of General Hancock, one of the greatest men in our late struggle, and he described to me some of the scenes of the battle of Gettysburg. I had read them and studied them; I had gone over the field myself, to look at the memorials of those scenes and their localities: but here was a man that commanded in the center, and saw the terrific charge, and could tell me just how the men came over the barricades, and what transpired; and there was in his narrative a life and power which I got from no books, and from no inspection of the battle-ground.

Why, when men were preached to about Jesus Christ, it was by a man that saw him; that ate with him; that sailed with him; that stood aghast at the miracles which brought

the dead to life; that went wondering out of the chamber where the daughter of the ruler was brought back again. This was the man that saw it; and what a vividness he gave to the picture!

Then, the expectation of seeing him again gave intensity to all these personal representations of Jesus Christ.

There was, besides this personal faith in him, the ethical motive, or what might be called the faith-disposition. Christ said, "Be ye like me. These states of mind which I have shown you, are the states of mind which you are to be in." The divine life, the soul life, was what he taught; and so, their faith included that whole life which is the antithesis of the life of the flesh. The world around them was living to the flesh; and they were a select people, gathered out into fraternities for the sake of living a life in the Spirit, as distinguished from a life in the flesh. For the sake of the Beloved who was gone, but gone for only a day, whose footsteps would soon be heard again, who would return and apprise them of what he wanted them to be,—for his sake they were living.

Such was their simple experience. All the early Christians believed in Jesus Christ, and believed in the necessity of having such dispositions as he had. That was their faith. If I were to give it a general designation, I should say that it was living by the power of a vivid, enthusiastic faith in a living God. I should say that it was the living of men in their higher nature and by their very highest dispositions.

Now, as to these trials—what were they? What was the trial of their faith? Why were these men attempting to be like Christ? They believed in him, rejoiced in him, and were getting ready to be like him, and to be translated with him. They were all of them training like a squad of soldiers. They were gathered together, and were being drilled, in the daily expectation that their General would come, and that they would be led into action. Day by day they were preparing themselves; and they earnestly longed for the time to arrive when he would come and say, "As good a set of men as ever I saw! Fine soldiers!" There was in them the ambition and enthusiasm of men in drill.

But a loftier trial than that of the soldier these men were undergoing—a spiritual drill. They were preparing themselves for glory and honor and immortality, to be revealed in the last days—days that were near, when they should die; for the end of their life was close at hand. What was the trial of the faith of these men in this life? It must have been a trial of all that is included in that faith, which is largely interpreted in the New Testament.

There was, in the first place, a great trial of the faith of Jewish Christians by reason of the perplexities which belonged to a transition from sensual worship to spiritual worship. They were brought up in the church. They were educated not only with a ritual, but with a provision for every conceivable side of their religious want, in the form of feasts, symbols, sacrifices. There were duties imposed upon them, both negative and affirmative. Their whole life was netted over with provisions for right conduct, within and without.

At length they came to a new life, in which the inspiration was Jesus Christ; and the whole drill was in the direction of right affections. Then innumerable questions came up, such as, "How shall we abandon that which we have been taught? Is there no value, then, in days, in feasts, in sacrifices, in meat offered to idols, in things consecrated?" These questions had to be asked, and they were grievous questions.

Some persons do not take anything hard. They are physically adipose, and they are mentally adipose; and the consequence is that they never suffer much. Yes, they keep Sunday because 'pa and 'ma told them they ought to keep it. They go down among the Quakers, who tell them that Sunday is a mere instrument, and that it is no more sacred than any other day; and then they say, "No, it isn't." They take on ideas easily and give them up easily; and it does not hurt them to do so. But there are intense natures that, when they believe a thing, it strikes through and through, and stains the very fiber of the soul with its colors; and when, by and by, with larger growth, they find that their early teaching was imperfect, and that their faith must

be changed, it is like tearing asunder the very structure of their minds.

You need not think that the greatest suffering has been that of martyrs: there has been as much suffering in sensitive consciences, on account of change of faith about which have clustered home associations, as martyrs have undergone. When one gives up father, and mother, and brothers, and sisters, and ventures into an unexplored, unknown region of belief, there is awful suffering. And among the early Christians there were many who, making the transition from Moses to Christ, were torn by fears and all manner of sensibilities.

We see the same thing going on to-day; and strange men meet each other on the road. John H. Newman, traveling from a spiritual faith towards an organized symbolic faith, with his face set as if he would go up to Rome, meets Père Hyacinthe coming down from Rome, where he has been disappointed and deceived, on his way toward a purely spiritual, and not a sensuous faith. So, men are going both ways: some from the spiritual, or from nothing, as they say, towards something, which they call the visible and the symbolic; and others from a dissatisfying use of the physical and ritual, down toward the spiritual and emotive.

It is always so; it always will be so; and the primitive Christians whom Peter addressed underwent this transition. Conversion with them did not mean the absolute settlement of all thoughts and questions. As long as it is summer, I care not how sheltered the lake is, the surface must be rippled more or less by the free winds. The only thing that will give it peace, is ice. Death gives peace; and when men come to torpidity or death, they have no more difficulties. Many persons say, "Why are not truths made so plain that we can understand them at once?" Why did not peaches grow so that we could get them everywhere whenever we wanted them? Why were not strawberries made to grow with sugar in the middle and cream all over them? Why was it necessary that men should plow? How much better it would be, if a plan could be invented by which plowing would be unnecessary! Bugs have nothing to do but run round and

round in the fields: why not have them do the plowing? Why was the world made as it is? To make men wake up from laziness, and work. The object in making men's surroundings such as they are is to stimulate them. God never meant that men should grow without effort. It was designed that they should think, that they should have doubts and perplexities, and that they should strive to overcome them. This is part and parcel of their discipline. It is by this that their faith is tried. There was a trial of the faith of the primitive Christians; it was a real trial; and it was severe in proportion as they had been deep and conscientious in their former beliefs.

The Gentiles had an equivalent to this, though we sympathize with them less than we do with the Jewish Christians. They had temples, and altars, and priests, and gods, and ethical religious duties. Because they were heathen, they were not, therefore, without any religion. The heathen had stamped everything with their own peculiar associations. There was hardly a common flower that had not some association with their religion. There was hardly a service or social custom that did not carry with it something religious. You could scarcely go in at a door or out of a door that there was not connected with the act some distinctive religious idea. If you ate, there were certain libations. If you drank, there were certain services. If you sat at table, you were crowned with flowers that meant one thing or another. If you took postures, they had a meaning. There were associations of heathen temple worship which spread themselves throughout society.

Now, when a heathen man became a Christian, being conscientious, he could not take such and such flowers, because they meant Apollo or Venus. He could not take this kind of food, because it signified a given faith. He could not go in that procession, because it was in honor of gods in which he did not believe. He found himself at every step running counter to his convictions. And he was looked upon as an infidel, as an unbeliever, as a worse than heretic.

So the Gentile Christians, when they became such, found themselves surrounded with evils in maintaining their faith

in Jesus. They were continually gashed and bruised by running against, or having pushed against them, the various notions of their countrymen, derived from their religion. Both Jew and Gentile suffered for their faith, in social alienations, in business hindrances, and in various other ways.

Let us suppose a case. A man that works for the shrine-makers at Ephesus, earning a dollar a day, beating out gods in silver and brass and what not, becomes a Christian, and his elder in the church says to him, "You can make a livelihood by making idols; but if you join the Christians, you must give up your business." He is one of the best workmen of his craft, and his master expostulates with him and says, "What! are you going, Epenetus?" "Yes," says the man. "Have I done anything to displease you?" "No." "Well, what is the matter with you?" "I have embraced the new faith." "The new faith! Hem! And that won't let you work for me?" "Well, it won't let me make idols." "Don't you believe in idols?" "I believe in the living God that made the heaven and the earth." "And you are going to leave me on that ground! Well, go; and as to your back wages, get them if you can. I should like to see a magistrate make me pay you what I owe you. Go among your Jew friends, and see what they will do for you."

So he was thrown out of work. He could not get anything to do. The avenues of business were full then as they are now. He found himself running against his family and against his old associations. His sphere narrowed, and he stood alone. Persons looked askance at him, and said, "Oh! you are one of those Christians;" and they had their jokes, doubtless, that were hereditary, which they used over and over again to throw at each other as men do nowadays. A man who undertook to be a Christian set himself against social feeling, and was ostracised by his countrymen. The whole power of ecclesiasticism was arrayed against him.

A man, we will suppose, stood high, and expected to be Mayor of the city of Ephesus. His daughter had gone over to the Christians. He said, "If this comes to the ears of the influential people of the town, there will be an end to my being

Mayor. She sha'n't do it." So the father dealt with his daughter through his ambition, and the same effect was produced which is produced nowadays where questions of sectarianism arise. Men believe in taking care of those who take care of them; in helping those who help them; in sympathizing with those who sympathize with them. They do not believe in folks of any other church. On the one hand, some of them get so high (there are high churches, you know) that they cannot see anybody that is low down; and on the other hand, some of them get so low down that they cannot see anybody who is high up. So there is division in the Christian church. The Calvinists are arrayed against the Arminians, and the Arminians are arrayed against the Calvinists. Orthodox people throw fire on the Universalists, and the Universalists throw fire back on the orthodox people, saying, "They believe in it, and they shall have it."

So society is split up. And if this is so to-day, what must have been the intensity of it in those early times! Yet, the early disciples were wretchedly poor; they were utterly unable to defend themselves; they were without churches, without precedents, without popularity, without anything except merely their own belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. How helpless they were under such circumstances!

But, after all, the greatest of their manifold troubles was to keep their spirit right; to be forgiving; to be charitable; to be benevolent. This was the charter of their faith: *Love your enemies.* They had no Thirty-nine Articles. They had no Five Points of Calvinism. There was not a catechism in the world for a hundred years after their time. They had not a gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had not written—not one of them. They had only a verbal testimony. They had the inspiration of the Divine Spirit. Their creed was: Love God who died by his Son to save you, and who soon shall come in glory to take you up; and prepare yourself for his coming by having such dispositions as will enable you to love your enemies, to bless them that curse you [and there were enough of them], to do good to them that hate you, and to pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you.

Now, these simple-minded men, women and children, under that condition of things—alienated, hindered in business, ridiculed, in every way misrepresented, perplexed on many questions in their own minds—attempted to keep their temper and live joyfully in their own circle or little assembly, and give back for curses benedictions, for hatred prayers, and for spite sweetness, and all gentleness and helpfulness; and was there no trial of their faith? Did you ever try to live so? Did you ever make it a week's aim, not to command your thoughts; not to have your volition right; but to have just your conduct right? Did you ever take that declaration, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father which is in heaven," and attempt to live in accordance with it? No man can undertake, as an actual experience, to live that life—full, strong, real, earnest—in the visible world, toward visible people, without knowing what the trial of his faith is—that is, the trial of his own ideal, or of his own scheme of duty, as it is laid out for him by God through Jesus Christ.

So then, we understand what the trial of their faith was. It was a manifold trial; it was a social trial; it was a business trial; it was a religious trial; it was a trial in every respect that made it hard for them to live above the world while they were in it, and to be like Christ while they stood waiting for his appearing.

Their whole Christian life, their faith, it is said, was by this trial to be brought to such a state as gold is in when it is put into a furnace and smelted. It goes in very large, and it comes out very small; but that which comes out is worth more, a great deal, than that which goes in; and the dross, the slag, is so much clear gain.

The Apostle takes that figure, and says, "Your faith, your high and holy hopes, your aspirations, are worth more than gold; and if gold, for the sake of making it more precious, is put into the fire, so your faith by these trials will be made more precious than gold, and will come forth to the praise and honor of God in the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This, then, is the equivalent of the passage in Hebrews which says:

"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

It is an interpretation of that great law of discipline which pervades universal human society; and it is designed not to pull down, not to degrade men, but to exalt them above the body and above mere temporal influences, and to force them into that higher life of faith which is permanent; which death cannot touch; which belongs to the higher sphere. It is the same thought which John expresses when he represents Christ as saying:

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth [pruneth], that it may bring forth more fruit."

It is that law of discipline by which men are, by the experience of outward life, made noble and spiritual, and advanced to higher degrees of excellence, and prepared for final glory.

Now, let us see if this general view of the New Testament is not also the view which is derived from another source. We find it in scattered texts and passages; but we do not find it there alone. Precisely the same law exists in every cultivated family. Take, for instance, a matron—I care not whether she be Greek, or Roman, or mediæval, or modern. You can all picture to yourselves what we see in every town—some woman of great nature, whose household grows about her, and whose thought for her children, early and late, is, how they shall become noble in manhood and womanhood. If she be a Christian matron, this idea is intensified, broadened and enriched. As her sons grow up, one of them develops a tendency towards art. She watches it jealously. She has an impression that art life is dissipated life; and she would repress that tendency in her son. She says nothing of her secret motive and reason, but she seeks to draw him away from those influences which lead him in the direction of art. But he will not be drawn away. The call is on him, and he forsakes every other industry, and *will* be an artist. He goes

to Europe. His name soon begins to sound abroad. The mother's pride is certainly pleased that he has shown himself to be truly a child of art; but there come to her also other tidings. Travelers return, and say, "Your son is living according to the customs of Paris;" and her heart aches night and day. She forgets his skill. Neither form, nor color, nor name, nor repute, nor revenue, is to her an equivalent. "Alas!" she thinks, "he is going to ruin." She writes him letters that he will not read. His conscience cannot bear them. His will is determined to pursue the life that he is on, and his mother's letters are opened and glanced through, and then they are quickly folded, labelled, and put away in his trunk; and they are unread letters until after-years come round. At last, tidings come to her, "He has fallen sick;" and as soon as conveyances can bear her there, leaving all the rest, leaving the ninety-and-nine, she goes into the wilderness after the one that is lost. She speeds to his side. Sick indeed he has been; he is a mere shadow; but, oh, how gentle, how like boyhood, he seems to her! How fondly he talks to her! How he confesses to her that all is wrong! He says, "You are God's angel to me, mother. I needed some one to whom I could confess. I am sick of my life here. I want to go back home and be a man. I renounce all pleasure and all temptation. I probably never shall labor again."

Oh, with what deep and unuttered delight that mother goes back with her consumptive boy! In him was her pride and her expectation; but he has gone wrong; and now there has come upon him the afflicting hand of God, and he has been rescued from the devil of his appetites and passions and vices; and though he is to have no career here on earth, she sings songs in the night, and prays with eyes filled with tears of gladness, "O God, thou hast given me back my son. He is a man again. He is pure. He is filled with religious aspirations. The world does not domineer over him any more." In the mother's thought, the trial of that man, which broke him down, and took away from him all earthly fascinations and ambitions, but which brought him to spiritual aspiration, to faith in God, and to hope of immortality,

was a cheap price to pay for the blessedness of his redemption.

A father hears that his son has come to New York, and that he is wonderfully prospered. He writes to him, "O my son! let not wealth allure you. Remember that you build houses here which perish, or that you perish out of them. Forget not that other house whose builder and maker is God. I rejoice in your wealth, but, oh! my son, I hear that you are becoming luxurious; I understand that you revel too much; I get word that your courses are not such as you used to follow when you were at home."

The story grows worse and worse; and it cannot be doubted that in a hundred ways the son is living for the flesh, for the pride of the eye, for the lusts of life, for pomp and vanity. He has an over-swelling prosperity; he is apparently having all his good things in this life; he seems likely to lack every good thing in the life to come: but all his prosperity does not make the father happy; and he says, "My son has forsaken the light of his youth; he is prospered in worldly things; and his prosperity threatens to destroy his soul."

At length, the times grow hard; money becomes tighter and tighter; and a rumor comes to the father, "Your son is embarrassed in his business affairs, but he says he is getting out of his embarrassment." By and by, however, a crash comes, and all his prosperity is scattered to the winds. His house is gone, his carriages are gone, his pictures are gone, his apparel of every kind is gone, and all his schemes of speculation have come to naught. Yesterday, he walked the street and felt that he was a monarch; to-day, he walks the street and is all collapsed. He hardly has enough to get his dinner with. He was rich, and everybody said, "Great man!" He is poor, and everybody says, "What a fool!" But his father says, "What a blessed bankruptcy that was! If my son had gone on in the way he was going, and been prospered, and money had flowed in on him, his pride would have swollen, and his life would have been worldly, and he would have been lost; but God was merciful to him, stopped him in his career, broke down his idols and altars, and he has nothing left."

He sends for him to come home; and then there is vacation and rest. Then there are communions. Then there come sweet and precious influences—those of a praying mother and of Christian sisters. Even the little village church brings back to him memories of his boyhood. On some Sunday, the word of truth is poured forth upon an ear, open, with no prejudices. He melts and is subdued under it; and he asks, humbly, in a changed state of mind, to be allowed to come in as a communicant among the people of God. He is accepted, and he becomes a worker. Having some little gifts of speech, he says, "Let me instruct others;" and in a modest way he goes about the neighborhood teaching; and, meeting with success, he becomes a missionary; and finally, he takes a slender stipend—perhaps, six hundred dollars a year—and preaches Christ among the poor, the outcast, the neglected. His father and mother rejoice over it, and say, "Oh, how good God is to our son! He took away his house, he took away his stocks, he overturned his prosperity; and now he has blessed him with conversion, and kindled in him faith, and hope, and love, and benevolence." The effect of the trial of his faith has been to purify it, to exalt it; and he has been made a man of God by his troubles.

Everybody knows that a wise parent always judges of what is good or bad for the child, first by its relation to the formation of his character, and then by its relation to his whole future life.

Now, the apostle exhorts the early Christians somewhat after this wise: Take all your besetments, your trials, your disappointments, your overthrows, and see to it that they force you up to higher patience. Find something that is so high that storms cannot touch it. Find treasures which moth and rust cannot corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal. Find viands that do not perish with the using. Let the trials and cares and burdens of life which come down on you, make you better; let them make you nobler—that is the thing.

Down under the hill in Peekskill, where the wind does not blow, the trees stand up straight—and why should they

not? but on the hill, where the southwest wind blows all summer, the trees all lean, and many of them become bent; but some trees there are standing on the top of the hill which are not bent, though the winds have blown upon them. Sturdy trees they are.

And he that stands sheltered in life, where no temptations can come upon him, except in minute and petty forms, stands reasonably virtuous and moral and religious; but it is no great credit to him. When, however, men are brought into circumstances where they are tried; where their faith in men is tried; where their faith in truth is tried; where their faith in justice is tried; where they are overturned, disappointed, riddled, annoyed, vexed, maltreated, cheated, choused, and rolled over and over like thistle-down in a raging storm—when amidst all these annoyances and troubles they are enabled to rise into a higher form of life, and to feel, "This world is not my home; this house and these surroundings are not necessary for me; this body is not me, the *I* is higher than the things of this world; the influences by which I am to be controlled are above the elements of time"—then they, by the trial of their faith, more precious than gold, are being purified, and are being prepared for that praise and glory which shall come only from the lips of their Saviour.

Christian brethren, do not let us attempt to organize our households or our business on the principle that he is prospered who, no matter what his moral state may be, has wealth and position and honor. There are thousands of what we call good men, good citizens, good neighbors, who are good-natured people enough, but whose whole aim of life is to stand well with their fellow-men; to have a comfortable independence; to share some small dividend of the honor that men have to distribute among them. As compared with vice, or besotted vulgarity, or stolid ignorance, such a life as theirs is a good life; they are living very high in that comparison: but as compared with the Christian ideal of a man who is living in this life for the other, and whose faith (that is, whose whole thought of God and immortality) is richer and more to him than any riches of the world that now is and is passing,—in comparison with that the life they live is

almost nothing. This Christian ideal is beyond their horizon and ken.

Whatever ambition, therefore, a man may have, let him beware. Christian men, fathers that are bringing your children up to honor and to prosperity, mothers that are seeking a settlement for your daughters, remember that while you are not to despise the outward conditions of this life, no person is well off who has not a hope of the other world. No man is made a *man* by worldly influences. The manhood that makes a man, and the womanhood that makes a woman, is wrought out of higher stuff than any secular acquisitions. It lies in a higher realm of thought and disposition and character.

Do not, therefore, aim so low as to think that you are succeeding when you are standing well among your fellow-men, and when your lower secular wants are bountifully supplied. And, on the other hand, do not suppose that you are unsuccessful in life when you have lost all outer habiliments, and have no particular station in society.

You are poor. You had riches, but they are gone, and they have left behind nothing but the memory and the habits which they nourished in you. Thousands will call you unfortunate; and you are unfortunate if, with the loss of these things, your pride is stronger than ever; if you are more irritable than ever; if you are all the time complaining and saying, "It was not always so with me; I was up above where I am now; I remember when I had my carriage" (oh, fool!): but if with the departure of these things there is God's blessing left behind,—namely, the hope of a better and the certainty of a sweeter and more joyful life beyond the grave,—then you are not dispossessed, and you are not unfortunate. He is an unfortunate man in life who has outward good and inward emptiness; but he who has the riches of God in his soul, though he live in a pauper's hut or in a poor-house (which is worse) is a happy man.

The last—the last—who are they? You go into the great house, and the master says, "This is my wife, sir; this is my eldest daughter, married and settled; these are my sons; and these are my friends; and they are very happy to greet you."

You remain one day and another, and you make a pleasant acquaintance with the family. They are refined, proud, highly cultivated, exquisite in manners, and selfish. By and by, you see a fragile form passing in and out, and say, "Who is that?" "Well," says the man, "it is a cousin of my wife's. She has been unfortunate. Her father was poor. She had very little opportunity to learn. We brought her here to give her a home. The children all take to her, and we let her have the run of the nursery; but she withdraws from company; she does not care for it"—and evidently they do not care to have her care for it. She is not living in the large way that they are. The drawing-room is not spread for her. The ample store of books was not purchased for her. She is not the pride of their eye, nor the joy of their heart. These daughters and sons are living a life of gayety and frivolity; but this pale creature is living a life of disinterested benevolence. Out of her pure soul overflow treasures for others' goblets, and not for her own, and all the angels that God sends to minister to that household first pay obeisance to her: for God says, "Those prosperous persons are the last and the lowest; and that neglected, sequestered creature—she is mine;" and if salvation comes to that house, it shall come through the lips of that saint unknown. "The last shall be first."

Are there no poor folks here? Are there no staggering old men here, who seem to themselves to have passed a life almost worthless? Are there no men here whose ambitions have been smitten? Are there no men here who have found how sordid the world is, how untrustworthy it is, and how little they would like to try it again? Are there no men here who are tired, tired, tired of the battle and the defeat? Are there no men here to-day who need my message, saying: Your trials, if you know how to make use of them, will make you better?

When a thousand years have gone by, you will turn to me, if you see me in the kingdom of glory (and you will see me if you go there), and say, "Now I understand the goodness and love of God, and the love of my fellow-men, of which you spoke. I understand the higher spiritual influence

which you tried to teach me. I can see that I was hunting with a muck-rake on the ground for money, while in the heaven above my head were truth, justice, obedience to God, and disinterested kindness to my fellow-men. I did not think of these things—nay, I coined them to get treasure; but blessed troubles came upon me, which taught me that the world was not worth having."

The world is worth having if you are worthy to own it; but if you are sensual and proud and devilish, all the treasures of Golconda can not make you happy. If, on the other hand, you are poor, and have patience, and are serene in the expectation of God, and are waiting for him, and are living a life that pours itself out as freely as the honeysuckle or the mignonette pours out its fragrance, unasked, and without reward—if you live such a life, no matter what your outward condition is, your trials and troubles are all purifying you and making you better.

Take care, rich men! Your riches will strangle you, and make you live for the present, and miss the dim bright lights which hang out for you in the heavens. Take care, men of trouble! Troubles often make men sordid, and selfish, and ugly, and vindictive. See that they make you better; that they take away the poison stings of your nature, and lift you up. All of you, remember that the life that is visible is not the real life; that the real life is the life that we do not see. The things that are visible are transient; only the things that are invisible are permanent. They abide; they wait for us; they call to us, saying, "Come; come:" and let our hearts say, "Even so, Lord Jesus, we come—through storms and through calm; through night and through day; 'mid the tempest's shock, where abound sands that betray, and rocks that bruise—we come, O Pilot and Captain, to thee!"

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Be pleased, O Lord our God, to kindle in our hearts to-day the light and the warmth of those that look in upon the heavenly state. How little is there in life out of which we can fashion our thought of thee! How little is there in the surrounding life, even of those who are best beloved by us, out of which we can fashion an idea of the general assembly and the church of the first-born, and the spirits of the just made perfect! How little can we understand, looking upon the work as it is going on in the heart, in ourselves and in our beloved, what is that wonderful thing which thou art doing in the inward and spiritual man, amidst all thy providential dealings and gracious work with the outward man! When we try to run our thought up into the heavenly realm where there is no selfishness, where there is no pride, where there are no bodily appetites, where there are no rivalries nor collisions, where there is no jealousy and no sin, nor anything that worketh harm, where tears are forgotten, and where sorrow is not known even as we know the distant sound of the ocean at night thundering on the far away shore, where all the past is as a dream, we cannot comprehend it—then how can we understand this heavenly state which is given to us by thy Spirit? Enkindle both our imagination and our understanding, O thou God of all truth and revelation, that we may have to-day some transcendent thought of the blessedness of those who die in Jesus; of the blessedness of those who faithfully are living in Jesus; of the blessedness of that mark at which all of us are aiming—the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. For this world is so bright, and the other brighter world is so dim; this world is so near to our senses, and that is so far away; our daily duties do so continually draw near and take possession of us; cares do so waste and grind us; all the way of life so thunders at our door, and beats in upon us; disappointments, and chagrins, and hopes unfulfilled, and bereavements, do handle us in such ways, as if we were captives and they were masters, domineering and cruel, that when we attempt to behold the land of freedom we have nothing wherewith to fashion it.

Oh, give to us some sense of ransomedness; give us some sense of the ineffable joy of those who, looking within, behold sweetness and harmony; and who, looking without, behold all blessedness, and gentleness, and goodness, and joy; and who, looking up, behold the glory of the Lord as the firmament above surrounding them everywhere.

Into this great life beyond, our thoughts pioneer; and we stand upon the edge, looking and beholding a little, and still all our thoughts must needs be in the fashion and shape of things that are; and things are so dissonant, so troublesome, so rude, so imperfect, that only from thee can come the inspiration we need. Thou who art peace, and who didst give to thy disciples perfect peace, which the world could not give or take away, breathe thy spirit of peace upon us. Thou that art pure, breathe into our souls that pure

love toward thee and toward each other out of which may come the revelation of that blessedness which awaits us beyond. Grant that God may seem to us more God than ever before—grand and merciful, and grand in mercy; long-suffering; patient, for the sake of cleasing men from guilt; waiting through ages, nourishing the poor and sin-stricken multitudes—yea, giving himself for them a ransom. Oh, give us to understand what infinite power, what everlasting wisdom, what wondrous skill, and what unfathomable thought, are energetically employed from eternity to eternity, in the purposes of breeding and brooding love. Give us some insight into thy nature; give us something that we can worship—and not when we are afraid; not when we are thinking of magnitudes for glory, but when we are thinking of our own weakness, and of our yearnings for goodness which we cannot lay hold on. When we are broken in our own sense and thought, and in our feeling seem like castaways, then is there not something in thee for us? O God! art not thou the Saviour? When we are disjoined from one another, yea, when we are adverse to each other, art not thou the Friend? When we are in darkness and in trouble, art not thou the Light? When all the world is given to penury, and is stingy of every joy, art not thou the Consoler, the Comforter? When doubts hang heavy, and there is no compass by which we can steer, art not thou the Leader? When all things seem to contest us, and when we ourselves are against ourselves, and everything that we meet day by day strikes us, and the battle goes against us, and we are pressed sore, art not thou the Captain of our salvation, the Conqueror through whom we shall be more than conquerors?

Oh, for deeper insight into the depths of thyself; of thy nature; of thy glorious functions; and of thy power for all the needy; of the office work of the mighty God in this universe springing from nothing, and working slowly by groans and tears and sufferings up towards spiritual manhood. Give us to-day some sympathy with thee, and thy gracious government of mercy, and love, and healing, that our souls may be strong, not in themselves, but in God.

And now, we beseech thee, O Lord our God, help us to be more fruitful in time to come. We seem to ourselves like the sands on which many rains have fallen; and they are but sands still, with few flowers, and but bitter herbs at that. How little are we ourselves like thee! How strong and at times how avaricious is our pride! How bitter are our resentments! How do we love cruelty, and desire to strike and to hurt! How are we filled with uncharitableness! How hard it is to get near to thee! We can but touch the hem of thy garment. Oh! let us come so near that we may lay our head in thy bosom. And grant that thus we may be born again, become sons of God, bear the lineage of our Father, carry his spirit, do his work, rejoice in his presence, hope for his salvation—sleeping, wake in his arms, and rejoice for evermore. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

THOU that didst bear the burden; thou that didst wear the crown; thou that didst find thy throne in the sepulcher; thou that out of death didst bring everlasting life; thou that didst by tears, and sorrow, and suffering give us leave to laugh and to be joyful: thou that wert a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and that now art Prince and Saviour in the heavenly land, reach forth to touch our hearts with the significance of thy life and the reality of thy being, that the waning faith of men may be strengthened. Oh, fill again the heaven and the earth with the glory of God; and to all that are in doubt and misled, tempest-tossed and not comforted, interpret once more thy providence, that every one may learn to love, and to abide in that love, which, descending, shall lead them to acts of benevolence among their fellow men. And so, we beseech thee that we may be prepared by joy and sorrow, by gain and loss, by all thy dealings, and especially by the rude chastenings which thou dost send upon us, by thy coronation of thorns upon our heads, by the ferrule, by goads, and by thorns in our side, to rise into glorious affinity with Jesus Christ, that his sufferings may be filled up in full measure in us, so that when he comes to reign, we may reign with him.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son, and Spirit. *Amen.*

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